



**Representative
Joe McDermott**

Committee assignments:

- Appropriations
- Education
- State Government Operations and Accountability

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2006 Session Preview

34th Legislative District

January 2006

Dear Neighbors:

I hope you had a happy and safe holiday season. This newsletter is designed to give you a heads-up on what we're doing under the capitol dome as the 2006 session gets started.

I remain committed to our district's issues, especially those that affect our schools and the way our children receive an education. I am also very concerned about the environment, economic growth, and the ways we travel in and around the 34th district.

There is a lot going on in our neck of the woods, but also across the state. My priorities are defined by my vision of our state government doing all it can to provide a stronger, more promising future for all Washingtonians.

That's why your insight is invaluable; every time you share your concerns and your ideas with me, you help me serve you better. Let's keep this dialogue going, it's made an important difference in our district.

Sincerely,

Joe McDermott
State Representative
34th Legislative District

The federal Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage Plan went into effect on January 1st. You can enroll, without penalty, until May 15, 2006. If you need help choosing a plan, or have questions regarding this program, please call the State Insurance Commissioner's SHIBA line: 1(800) 562-6900

Rep. Joe McDermott • 34th District

EDUCATION

The WASL

Parents and students are worried about passing the Washington Assessment of Student Learning, which will be a graduation requirement starting in 2008. We need to look at reforms so kids that don't test well can pass this test. I support Gov. Gregoire's plan to give our local school districts money for summer school, intensive tutoring, and other focused learning opportunities for students who need help.

We will work on approving "alternative assessments" – that is, other ways for students to show they have the reading, writing and math skills tested in the WASL. One proposed alternative will be a collection of student work; another will be a calculation of grades and WASL scores. These alternatives will be a big help for kids who just don't test well.

We need to do all we can to help every student meet the academic standards we have set. In today's economy students need higher levels of skill and knowledge. But we will be watching this issue closely to make sure that the WASL is fair, that all students have equal opportunities to learn, and that in 2008, every studious high school senior can attend a graduation ceremony.

Drop-out Prevention

One out of three high-school kids drops out of high school. One of three. That's a terrible number that directly leads to poverty, crime and an unstable society.



Last session we took a good first step to giving more kids a good future with House Bill 1708, which took a hard look at the problem of drop outs:

- What causes kids to drop out of high school?
- How can we keep kids in school until they get their degree?
- What solutions have a proven track record of success for kids?



Now that the answers are in, we can make progress during the 2006 session with reforms to make sure our kids stay in school until they get their diploma.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

This fall Washington employers added 11,700 net new jobs and the number of unemployed people fell by 7,900 compared to last year. We need to keep the economy moving in this direction.

As you know, there's a surplus in the state's revenue. This is good news, but we have to keep in mind this the second year of the budget cycle, so we need to be very careful as to where and how we make new investments.

We have to increase funding for the state's pension systems to ensure our strong fiscal health. And we must also make sure we have sufficient reserves, in case we need them down the road.

I am sure we can reach a balance that keeps our economy strong and meets the needs of Washington's people.

PROTECTING OUR FERRIES

In 2005, the Legislature created a 19-member task force to come up with ways to pay for passenger ferries. I was one of the members and I can tell you that of the possibilities laid out on the table, only one really makes sense: expanding the Seattle-Vashon route to include a stop at Southworth is the answer.

Not only would the triangle route ensure reliable service for these communities, it would also end up saving money. Because of the increased ridership and improved service, it would cost state taxpayers less to add Southworth than to keep the current Vashon-Seattle route.

Since the taskforce did not reach a consensus, we hired an independent consultant to review the different proposals and costs.

Given the time constraints, the consultant's report didn't answer all our questions, so those are left for the Legislature to resolve. We did agree that passenger only ferry service is an important facet to our state transportation system, with first tier priorities being Vashon, Southworth, Bremerton, and Kingston.

2006 Session Preview

HEALTH CARE

Medical Malpractice

Now that voters rejected both medical malpractice initiatives, the 2006 Legislature will work on developing balanced legislation regarding insurance reform, patient safety and civil justice reform.

Statewide Smoking Ban

After working on this issue for more than three years, I was happy with the voter's decision to protect employees by making all workplaces smoke-free.

We have now joined other smoke-free states like California, Maine, Montana and New York, to name a few.

This law frees people from having to work in a smoky environment. Everyone in Washington State can now truly exercise his or her right to breathe clean air. I find this a true accomplishment.

ENVIRONMENT

Getting ready for a Disaster

The entire nation was affected and appalled by the events that followed Hurricane Katrina. It got us all thinking about what would happen if something like that takes place here.

Lawmakers from the House and Senate traveled around Washington State, meeting with citizens and talking about how to best protect your family during a disaster as a member of the State Government Operations and Accountability Committee, I attended the hearings in Spokane and Tacoma.

After listening to citizens and experts, we'll be working on a number of reforms that include measures to protect your family in case of:

- floods or wildfires;
- a major earthquake or tsunami;
- a volcanic eruption or mudflow from Mt. Rainier; or
- a global bird flu pandemic.

Scientists agree that with regards to a giant earthquake or the next volcanic eruption, the question is not if, but when. So it's our duty to prepare the best we can and make sure our families have the skills and resources to survive the three to seven days before real federal help can arrive.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Let Me Know...

You can help me serve you effectively by telling me what's on your mind – please don't hesitate to contact me! This pre-addressed response card will come directly to me. Just fold it so the return mail panel is showing, place a stamp on it and drop it in the mail!

Dear Joe: _____

Sincerely, _____

address: _____

phone: _____

e-mail : _____



Please
place
stamp
here

State Representative

P.O. Box 40600

Olympia, WA 98504-0600

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Let Me Know... *continued*

Comments:

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